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Senate Panel Chops Embassy Security Program

Overriding objections from Secretary of State George P. Shultz, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 14 dealt a major blow to the State Department's program to beef up security for U.S. embassies and diplomats overseas.

The committee approved $1.1 billion, over two years, for the program. President Reagan had asked Congress to commit itself to a $4.4 billion program over five years.

Chairman Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind., who proposed the cutback, said even the amount approved by the committee may prove difficult to obtain in a year of heavy budget cuts. "It's going to require a great deal of persistence to get $1.1 billion," he said.

In a turnabout from standard politics on most issues, several committee Democrats led a campaign on behalf of Reagan's request. But that effort fell short when the committee rejected, 7-10, an amendment by Paul S. Sarbanes, D-Md., to restore $250 million for high-priority items.

The Democrats said they accepted Reagan's argument that the need to improve diplomatic security against terrorist attacks took priority over the drive for budget cutbacks.

Some Democrats also seemed to be reacting to warnings by Shultz that he would hold Congress accountable for future attacks, such as those against U.S. targets in Lebanon in 1982-83.

Speaking of Congress, Shultz told reporters on May 11: "One of these days, there'll be another tragedy at some embassy. Then they'll come around and say: 'You're derelict in your duty because all these people got killed.' And I'm going to say: 'I'm not derelict in my duty, because you wouldn't appropriate the money to provide for the security of people who are living constantly under threat.' "

Shultz was responding in particular to the Senate's passage of a budget resolution (S Con Res 120) that provided only $500 million in fiscal 1987 for diplomatic security improvements, less than half of Reagan's $1.4 billion request. By contrast, the House-passed budget resolution (H Con Res 337) provided $1.1 billion. *(Budget resolutions, p. 1079)*

—*By John Felton*

Democrats Try in Vain To Restore Some Funds

Lugar said he hoped to get the diplomatic security bill (HR 4151) onto the Senate floor as soon as possible. The Democratic-controlled House on March 18 approved Reagan's full request, tagging on several unrelated anti-terrorism provisions. Lugar jabbed at the House for uncritical handling of the issue, saying that chamber gave it "no particular consideration at all."

The House and Senate bills authorize funds and State Department programs to boost diplomatic security. Actual appropriations for fiscal 1986, the first year of the program, are included in a supplemental spending bill (HR 4515) passed by the House on May 8 and pending in the Senate. *(Weekly Report pp. 1133, 1065, 968, 654)*

Cutting Back

In spite of its cost, the diplomatic security bill is popular in Congress because its stated purpose is to protect overseas employees of the State Department and other agencies against terrorist attacks.

Nevertheless, Lugar decided that Reagan's request had to be pared for two reasons: overall budget-cutting would force reductions in all foreign programs, and a committee staff investigation found several cases in which proposed embassy rebuilding projects appeared unjustified or overly expensive.

When the panel took up the issue on May 14, Lugar proposed a full-scale substitute authorizing $1.1 billion.

The biggest proposed cut was for the embassy construction program. Reagan had sought $1.5 billion over fiscal 1986-87 to buy land for and build or renovate more than 100 diplomatic posts. Lugar cut that to $857.8 million by eliminating projects the State Department listed as low priority and by approving only 80 percent of the funds for high-priority projects. Committee staff aides said they came up with the 80 percent figure because an investigation showed the department's proposals were excessive by an average of 20 percent.

Other items in Lugar's proposal:

- $245.3 million for salaries and other expenses related to security measures, compared with Reagan's $541 million request;
- $4.8 million, the request, for anti-terrorism aid to foreign countries;
- $2 million for research on equipment to combat terrorist attacks, compared with Reagan's $30 million request.

"I don't want to vote for a cut and have something happen" at an embassy.

—Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes, D-Md.

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FOREIGN POLICY NOTES

Officials Charge Mexican Corruption

Abandoning traditional diplomatic language, Reagan administration officials on May 13 told a Senate subcommittee that Mexico is losing control of drug smuggling, in part because of corruption in the government.

Top officials of four agencies, including the State Department, told the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs that Mexico, which once had a "model" program to control drug trafficking, is now a major source of heroin, cocaine and marijuana entering the United States.

William von Raab, the U.S. Customs commissioner, told the subcommittee that increased drug smuggling was made possible by "the ingrained corruption in Mexican law enforcement." There is corruption "up and down the ladder," he said, but it is especially rife at "lower levels."

Under the chairmanship of Jesse Helms, R-N.C., the subcommittee held a closed hearing on May 12 and a public session the next day. Helms said he would hold another hearing in June.

The hearings were unusual for two reasons: Congress rarely inquires into Mexican affairs, and Helms charged that Mexican government officials, whom he would not name, made "strong attempts to thwart" the hearings.

Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, told Helms his hearings "will have a major impact in Mexico. The government is going to be angered by this kind of discussion in public." Nevertheless, Abrams said he supported the hearings.

The Mexican government on May 14 filed a note with the State Department protesting the hearing, and a statement issued May 15 by the Mexican Embassy in Washington called the U.S. charges a "clear and unacceptable violation of Mexico's sovereignty." The statement also rejected "the accusations and calumnies pronounced against Mexico in the hearings."

Panel Approves State Aide

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 14 approved the nomination of Morton I. Abramowitz to be assistant secretary of state for intelligence and research. The vote was 16-1, with Jesse Helms, R-N.C., dissenting.

Helms had delayed action on the nomination, expressing concern about Abramowitz' views on U.S. policy toward China and Taiwan. Helms charged that Abramowitz in the early 1970s had written a book that advocated "selling out" the government on Taiwan.

A career foreign service officer, Abramowitz has been director of intelligence and research at the State Department for one year. His nomination to assistant secretary was a promotion. *(Weekly Report p. 968)*

Lugar also stripped from the House-passed bill several unrelated anti-terrorism provisions, such as one establishing a list of "most wanted" terrorists. However, Lugar retained three provisions sought by the administration. They added $5 million for a new program of rewards for information about terrorists, authorized protection of witnesses who provide information about terrorist incidents outside the United States, and authorized the State Department to regulate the provision of training and other services to the security forces of countries that support terrorism.

Lugar called his proposal "a responsible and responsive approach" that would give the State Department about half the money it sought for 1986-87. Lugar also noted that fiscal 1986 ends Sept. 30, and so the State Department cannot spend all the money in that year that Reagan sought. Early next year, he added, the committee will consider a new authorization for the following two years.

Sarbanes challenged Lugar's proposal and demanded to know what specific items would be cut. When Lugar and his aides said they had used formulas to reduce the requested amounts, Sarbanes noted Shultz' implied threat to blame members of Congress if terrorists attack an unprotected embassy in the future.

"I don't want to vote for a cut and have something happen" at an embassy, Sarbanes said.

Sarbanes proposed adding $284.6 million to Lugar's proposal to give the State Department enough money for all its highest-priority projects in fiscal 1986-87. Doing that, he said, would "put the committee in a stronger position" to ward off potential criticism of the cutbacks.

At the suggestion of Charles McC. Mathias Jr., R-Md., the committee deleted from the Sarbanes proposal $34 million that the State Department wanted for a secret personnel program. Mathias said diplomats with whom he spoke "disagree that this is a good idea."

Committee and State Department officials refused to reveal details of the program Mathias cited.

On a roll-call vote, the committee then rejected Sarbanes' revised amendment for a $250 million increase in the $1.1 billion program. Voting yes were: Mathias; Sarbanes; Claiborne Pell, D-R.I.; Joseph R. Biden Jr., D-Del.; Alan Cranston, D-Calif.; Thomas F. Eagleton, D-Mo.; and John Kerry, D-Mass.

Voting no were: Lugar; Jesse Helms, R-N.C.; Nancy Landon Kassebaum, R-Kan.; Rudy Boschwitz, R-Minn.; Larry Pressler, R-S.D.; Frank H. Murkowski, R-Alaska; Paul S. Trible Jr., R-Va.; Daniel J. Evans, R-Wash.; Edward Zorinsky, D-Neb.; and Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn.

The committee adopted three other amendments to the underlying bill, which was reported by voice vote:

- By Dodd, adding $7.2 million to the regular fiscal 1987 authorization for the Peace Corps operating budget, raising the total to $137.2 million. The vote was 8-2.
- By Zorinsky, placing restrictions on a program to protect spouses of heads of state who visit the United States, and curbing the availability of blueprints for embassies and other diplomatic buildings, by voice votes.

The day after the Senate panel acted, the cuts in the embassy program were played down by Dante B. Fascell, D-Fla., chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "It's just a different approach" to giving the administration what it wants, he said, predicting little controversy when the bill reaches a conference committee. ▮

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